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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHENGDU 000257

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SUBJECT: LHASA STORIES: MONK, CONSTRUCTION WORKER, WRITER, CAB
DRIVER, ENGINEER

REF: A) 08 CHENGDU 184; B) CHENGDU 228 C) 08 CHENGDU 183; D) CHENGDU 254; E) 08 CHENGDU 78; F) CHENGDU 251; G) 08 CHENGDU 287

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CLASSIFIED BY: David E. Brown, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
General Chengdu.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary: Conversations with non-official Han and Tibetan residents of Lhasa reflect continuing tight government controls and the quiet determination of many Tibetans to remain loyal to their religious leader, the Dalai Lama. Young monks at Sera Monastery showed off a cell phone picture of the Dalai Lama's meeting with then Senator Obama. A renowned Tibetan writer -- whose home has police snipers stationed on his roof overlooking the Barkhor -- argued ironically that he is a free man. A Han taxicab driver explained that the superior Han work ethic compared with Tibetans gives him a big competitive advantage in Lhasa. An ethnic Han electric power engineer working in the TAR called steadily worsening corruption and rapacity of northern Han against the people of southern China the two fatal constants in Chinese history. End summary.

The Young Sera Monastery Monks' Story

12. (C) ConGenOff went to Sera Monastery one afternoon. A sign in Tibetan, Chinese, and English at the gate warns tourists against visiting the monks' apartments or engaging in any activity that "threatens China's national security." The monastery was much more lively and calmer than when ConGenOff last visited in August 2008 (ref A), when he encountered a few nervous monks, some apparently fake monks, and an angry layman. On this trip, however, several hundred monks, reading and chanting, filled the Sera Monastery Assembly Hall. From time to time, sneakered novice monks charged at full speed out of the hall to bring back big pots of milk tea for the assembled monks.

13. (C) Afterwards, ConGenOff continued walking around the Sera Monastery grounds. He came upon a group of young, mostly teenage monks standing by a stone wall, and started talking with them. The youngest monk said that he was (only) 13 years old, and his parents live in Lhasa. [Note: TAR officials say that everyone must complete eight years of compulsory education before becoming a monk, so 13 might be the youngest age a monk could meet compulsory schooling requirements and then enter the monastery. However, in 2008, ConGenOff visited other monasteries in Lhasa with monks as young as eight years of age (ref A). End note.] The young monks invited ConGenOff to come into the courtyard to watch them as they prepared for their logic/debate class. The monks said there were about 300 monks and 80 student monks in the monastery. One young monk showed ConGenOff a picture on his cell phone as eight other young monks gathered round. The picture, entitled "Happy New Year 2009" showed then Senator Barack Obama together with the Dalai Lama. The young monk had needed to push about five buttons to bring up the picture, so it was stored in somewhere under many layers of cell phone menus where it would be hard to find. When asked if they could have pictures of the Dalai Lama in their rooms, one monk answered, "No, that would be impossible. They watch us too closely for that." The young monks also showed ConGenOff their pictures of British soccer stars and other celebrities.

A Talk with Construction Workers at the Tibet's Holiest Temple

14. (C) After striking up a conversation in Tibetan with Tibetan construction workers renovating part of the second floor of the Jhokang Temple, one of the workers said upon hearing that ConGenOff is from the United States, "The Dalai Lama just went to America! He didn't see Obama this time. When will he see him?" and later said "The Dalai Lama goes there twice a year. Now he has returned to Dharamsala. Perhaps he will meet Obama next time." [Comment: Tibetans are often well-informed about the Dalai Lama and Tibet-In-Exile, apparently through VOA (ref B), Radio Free Asia, the Internet, telephone calls, and personal visits despite strong PRC efforts to cut off information from the outside world. These efforts include smashing private satellite dishes, setting up jamming transmitters mounted on high towers in Tibetan areas, and replacing the dishes with government-approved village cable systems that carry only approved television and radio channels. End comment.]

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15. (C) ConGenOff while in Lhasa visited Tashi Tsering, a Tibetan who reached Lhasa for studies from rural Tibet, later studied in the U.S., returned to China just before the Cultural Revolution, was jailed as a rightist, and was rehabilitated in 1980 and permitted to return to Lhasa. Tashi Tsering is the author of "The Struggle for Modern Tibet -- The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering" which was published by M.E. Sharpe in 1997. In Lhasa, Tashi Tsering became famous for his English language school, his widely used Tibetan-Chinese-English dictionary, and for finding scholarships for Tibetan students. Now in his mid-70s, Tashi Tsering lives in an apartment on Barkhor Square. Tashi Tsering told ConGenOff that he has been a free man since 1980, and has excellent relations with many Tibetan Autonomous Region Officials. He also said that soldiers have been standing on his roof, (part of the continuing heavy People's Armed Police and Public Security presence overlooking and around Barkhor Square and Barkhor Street (ref C)), ever since the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

16. (C) Tashi Tsering said that he was concerned that the status of the Tibetan language in the TAR had declined after the 2000 repeal of a 1983 law during the administration of TAR Communist Party Secretary Chen Kaiyuan, whom Tashi Tsering termed "a leftist." Tashi Tsering said that he believed that more use of the Tibetan language in mathematics and science courses was essential to train up a generation of Tibetan scientists and engineers. The abstract concepts in these fields are even more difficult to grasp when studied in a foreign language, he said. Tashi Tsering had repeatedly written to TAR officials calling for the law to be re-instated. He said he was pleased when his proposal was discussed positively by a panel of Tibetan and Chinese experts two years ago. ConGenOff repeatedly asked Tashi Tsering if the law in effect from 1983 - 2000 made any difference -- were there more Tibetan classes then? He repeatedly refused to answer this question, suggesting that ConGenOff contact some retired professors of Tibet University to get the answer. [Comment: For a self-described "free man", Tashi Tsering was very careful about what he said. Prof. Luozang of Tibet University told ConGenOff separately (ref D), that he teaches in Tibetan a course on problems of the computerization of the Tibetan language. End Comment]. Tashi Tsering said he is working on a new edition of his Tibetan-Chinese-English dictionary.

The Han Taxicab Driver's Story

17. (C) Taxicab driver Wu came to Lhasa from Wuhan three years ago after he was laid off by his state-owned company. Finding a new job at age 50 in China is very hard, he said. He chose Lhasa because the threshold for going into business for himself was lower than in a Chinese city of the interior. This is largely because most Tibetans are less educated than most Han migrants, and do not have a strong work ethic. Now he drives his personally owned taxi and is earning a good living. The ethnic Han can "eat bitterness," said Wu, but Tibetans are not so eager to work. The government spends vast amounts of money to develop the TAR and to help the Tibetans. The Tibet problem, including the religious issue tied up in it, are complicated said Wu. All of his family are still in Wuhan. Life on the high plateau (Lhasa is at 3600 meters altitude) is unhealthy and can cause various long-term physiological problems, he said. Wu plans to retire in a few years and go home to Wuhan.

A Recurring Theme: Lazy Tibetans vs. Hard Working Han

18. (C) Comment: Many people, both Han and Tibetan observations between "hard working Han and easy going Tibetans." Some Tibetans worry that vast investments in the TAR by the Chinese government and the most prosperous provinces assigned

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responsibility for developing various parts of Tibet (and bringing in companies and workers from the donor provinces to build turn-key infrastructure and other projects) are creating a welfare mentality among Tibetans and producing a kind of development quite different from what a more internally driven development might have produced. At a deeper level, Tibetans face an incentive problem: Tibetans have difficulty competing with middle school graduate Han migrants because of language problems and ethnic discrimination. Tibetan students, competing in their second language with Han students who are doing schoolwork in their native language, are often perceived to be less bright.

19. (C) The Chinese Communist Party mantras of development and social stability are still felt by many Tibetans to be programs imposed by outsiders and an alien culture. Many Tibetans feel intimidated by a government, military, and police presence that is more intrusive than in other parts of China, and so passively resist the outsiders; the tyranny of low expectations from society which makes many Han look down at them, and many Tibetans to internalize feelings of inferiority. The resulting passivity seems to be among the underlying causes of the widely reported "Tibetan laziness." Still, welfare money pumped in from outside the TAR is raising living standards, and improving

education and housing for Tibetans. Questions to Chinese officials about the economic marginalization of Tibetans during our October trip also elicited a response about the excellent welfare and assistance that Tibetans receive due to the solicitude of the Party and government. One result of these attitudes is discrimination against Tibetan workers (ref E), which Consul General noted during the October 2009 trip to Lhasa (ref F), and ConGenOff also perceived on a November 2008 trip to Linzhi in southeastern TAR (ref G). End comment.]

A Talk with An Electric Power Engineer Who Works in the TAR

¶10. (C) On the flight back from Lhasa to Chengdu, ConGenOff talked with an electric power engineer and a manager at Chengdu Jiachen Dianqi. He makes several trips a year of two weeks or more to help build electric power networks in remote parts of the TAR. He said that the TAR has four major but unconnected electric power grids and some isolated county level power grids because of the great size of the TAR -- it is bigger than Alaska. He sees two constants in Chinese history: bureaucracies gradually become so corrupt that nobody will support the state and so it collapses and the rapacity of the north Han Chinese people, who "regularly and violently plunder southern China." The engineer remarked on the large number of Chinese leaders who are electric power engineers: in the 1950s electric power networks were key to national construction and so attracted the best talent.

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